



Week 5 – Generosity

SETTING:

Before the group arrives prepare the room, with seats in the round and a central table. Soft lighting helps, and try to have everything you need in place before people arrive. Place two large plates on the table in the middle of the room. On one put a large bunch of red grapes, the other plate should have a loaf of bread on it. Light the candle and instead of the usual takeaway items have a bowl with some large nails inside, one for each person. For this session you will also need some bibles to use in small group work, and a pack of greetings cards (with envelopes), enough for one each.

As the group arrives play some music to go with the theme. For example: 'One Love' (Bob Marley); 'We are the world' (USA). 'You are Holy' (YFriday). Feel free to choose other music that you think would fit the theme or set the right atmosphere.

WORSHIP AND WELCOME (15 mins):

Begin with these opening words followed by a moment of silence.

**All: God of the harvest, we have heard your call and we have come.
 We are in awe of your everlasting love.
 We are humbled by your belief in us.
 We are sorry for our reluctance and our apathy.
 We are ready to toil together in your vineyard, and to unveil your Kingdom on earth...
 That the last may be first and all may share in your feast of life.**

Silence

Now encourage people to open their Windows on the Week (see course notes) and share those things for which they are thankful (gestures of kindness, gratitude for health, a moment of beauty). Allow a moment of quiet after each to allow the group to reflect. After the group has shared, hold a time of silence or open prayer followed by:

Leader: Almighty and everlasting God,
 Who in your tender love towards the human race
 sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
 to take upon him our flesh
 and to suffer death upon the cross:
 grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
 and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever.

OR The Lord's Prayer.

Welcome everyone and thank them for coming. In this session we are turning our direction towards the cross in our thinking and conversations.

OPEN QUESTION (10 mins):

Ask the group to share, either with the whole group or in pairs, the answer to this question:

When did you last experience generosity that moved you?

What is the difference between generosity and kindness?

These can be shared openly, but use your discretion.

WORD PLAY (15 mins):

As a group piece together the key elements of the biblical narrative of Maundy Thursday, bringing together the four gospel accounts. Ask participants what they remember from the narratives. Here are some ideas:

Passover, preparing the room, predicting Judas' betrayal, predicting Peter's denial, sharing the bread and wine, washing the disciples' feet, dispute about who is the greatest, 'I am the vine and you are the branches', praying in the Mount of Olives, the disciples falling asleep as Jesus prays, Judas betraying with a kiss, Peter cutting the ear off the soldier, Peter's denial.

If participants struggle then pass some bibles to help them (Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12, Luke 22:7, John 13)

Ask what element of this narrative strikes people most strongly, and why?

CONVERSATION (30 mins):

(Explain) The themes that we have been exploring in the last few weeks with the parable also run through the accounts we have of Christ's last day:

Abundance – the feast of the Passover, the bread and the wine shared with the disciples

Dignity – the disciples were all invited guests to the meal

Compassion – the prayers of Jesus in the garden, and his forgiveness declared on the cross

Grace – Jesus washes the disciples' feet

The Master in the parable mirrors Christ in his capacity give; to empty himself for the love of those he came to save.

(Ask) What other links can you see between these themes of generosity, and Christ's giving of himself?

(Ask) What have we (re)discovered during this course about God's gifts and the way that God gives? How do we see this giving reflected in the journey to the cross?

(Sum-up) Generosity and grace are not kindness or being nice – look at the cross. The things that move and change us are not kind and nice, they are passionate and abundant and grace-filled.

(Ask) Would most people describe our church as 'passionate, abundant and grace filled', or 'nice' and 'kind'? How would they describe us as individuals? (Be careful how you share the reflections from this second question).

(Sum-up) It is very easy to fall into the trap of being kind and nice rather than being generous.

Generosity requires vulnerability, risk taking and giving ourselves to God and others. We can only

truly changes communities and the world when we are generous self-giving communities, not nice places to be.

(Ask) What times in history has the church demonstrated itself as a self-giving generous community? How might we emulate that in our own time and context?

(Explain) The parable climaxes with the revelation that in the Kingdom of God everything is upside down and unexpected: 'So the last will be first, and the first will be last'. Jesus takes ordinary things and transforms them into the wonderful and miraculous, just as he does in the last supper, and as he turns humiliating death and sacrifice into the new life of the resurrection.

(Ask) How can we transform our mundane gifts (money, time, talents etc) into the miraculous?

(Explain) We have been on a journey these last few weeks. We have seen that God provides abundance for us, calls us to be co-workers, banishes fear, gives us compassion, and loves us beyond measure.

(Ask) If we accept and feel all of that then what does that mean for us? What does it mean for our relationship with God and the world?

(Response) Encourage each participant to reflect silently on what has spoken to them, and how they wish to respond to the message of this course. Then invite each person to write themselves a card which reflects on their experience, and expresses how they would like to live more generously. These can be collected up and will be posted to them (by you) at Pentecost as a reminder of their own commitment.

As people write their card play the song "Love each other" by Graham Kendrick. This can be found available on the website.

THANK YOU and GOODNIGHT (10 mins):

Ask participants to reflect for a moment on what they have seen and heard, and then invite them to take nail from the table. As each person holds their nail we offer this prayer:

All: *Nails in your hands, love in your heart. Lord Jesus you gave of yourself.*

Leader Courageous Christ

Nails pinned you to the cross.

With workaday tools they fixed you in place, and in eternity.

But their attempt to contain you set you free.

Their ruthless execution gave birth to everlasting life.

All: *Nails in your hands, love in your heart. Lord Jesus you gave of yourself.*

Leader Crucified Christ

Nails alone did not hold your broken body to the scaffold.

Their cold iron stands for the fear, the prejudice, the abuse of power,

The arrogance, the ignorance, the violence

That even today crucify the poor and the powerless.

All: *Nails in your hands, love in your heart. Lord Jesus you gave of yourself.*

Leader: Compassionate Christ

Nails were designed to build and not destroy,
To bind together not rip apart.
By your spirit transform them and us
From the ordinary to the extraordinary.

All: *Nails in your hands, love in your heart. Lord Jesus you gave of yourself.*

Leader: Let us take our nails and carry them with us to bless and challenge us on our journey
And let us share with each other the words of the grace.

All: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.

Play some music as people say farewell and leave.